

GURNET

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Erosion Forces Relocation of Historic Gurnet Light

Last week the Coast Guard announced plans to move Gurnet Light, the oldest wooden lighthouse in the country, after concerns about erosion were seen as threatening to write a final chapter to its 154 year history.

Chief Warrant Officer Richard Cleary of the First Coast Guard District in Boston said the 43-foot tall lighthouse will be moved several hundred feet inland.

Gurnet Light would be the third lighthouse in Massachusetts to be moved in about a year. This past summer, Highland Light in North Truro was moved 450 feet from the edge of the cliff because of erosion. In the fall, Nauset Light in Eastham was moved 300 feet inland.

The lighthouse, which is on the National Register of Historic sites, is one of 2 towers built in 1843.

The first light station on the Gurnet was made up of twin lighthouses and was built in 1768 and later destroyed by fire in 1801 just before the single lighthouse was built in 1843.

Long time resident Elaine Nudd, who has lived on the Gurnet year-round for the 18 years described the erosion problem as "devastating". "We've watched it over the years and we used to think it was 6 inches or a foot a year. Now its several feet every year."

The Gurnet is the "elbow" of the thin spit of land shaped like a crooked arm stretching into Duxbury and Plymouth Bays. Saquish Head forms the end of the peninsula. Although it is part of the town of Plymouth, land access is through Duxbury and the town provides emergency services to the residents.

About 250 homes are situated on the peninsula, about 50 of which are located on the Gurnet; 8 used year round.

At least 2 homes on the Gurnet have been moved inland in the past several years because of erosion, which has claimed anywhere from 10 to 30 feet of the Gurnet in the past 10 years.

Some residents feel the decision to relocate the historic landmark is premature and that the site has another hundred years before it is in serious jeopardy from erosion.

Cost estimates were unavailable. The work is planned for the fall and will involve the Army Corps of Engineers and the Coast Guard civil engineering unit in Providence, R.I.